



Affordable housing saving rural services

Rural life monitor 2017

**NATIONAL
HOUSING
FEDERATION**

Introduction

It is now widely accepted that England is in the midst of a housing crisis. The crisis is characterised differently across the country, and that is no exception for rural areas. Housing is, on average, less affordable in rural areas than in urban areas, and in 2016 the cheapest homes in rural areas cost 8.3 times lower incomes compared with 7 times in urban areas¹.

Rural life has a lot to offer – schools in these areas have a higher proportion of pupils leaving with five GCSEs graded A*-C², and life expectancy in rural areas is consistently higher than in urban areas. However, the make-up of rural communities is changing. One in five English households live in rural areas³, and by 2039 nearly half of rural households will be aged over 65⁴.

We know that many people choose to leave rural areas and commute to nearby towns and cities to work, with some choosing to move out altogether for that reason. Young members of the rural population move to urban areas for university, and do not return. Rural connectivity to broadband and public transport limits the number of people willing to start and run businesses from rural areas. By 2039, the number of working age households in England is projected to fall by 1% in rural areas while increasing in urban areas by nearly 11%⁵.



One in five English households live in rural areas

^{1, 2}, DEFRA. Statistical Digest of Rural England: May 2017 (footnote 1 refers to lower quartile prices and incomes)
https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/615855/Statistical_Digest_of_Rural_England_2017_May_edition.pdf

^{3, 4, 5} NHF analysis of DCLG Household projection figures

We know that services in rural areas, such as schools and pubs, are the pillars of rural community life. It is widely accepted that these services are increasingly at risk of closing where rural areas have suffered from lack of investment in new affordable homes. Without this investment, it is difficult for families to grow and remain in the same area, and more difficult for people to move to these areas, putting the long-term sustainability of local businesses at risk.

This report finds that over the last five years, 52 rural schools shut their doors to pupils – roughly one a month. Post offices are closing at a similar rate. And between March 2013 and December 2016, 1,365 rural pubs closed – that’s seven pubs a week serving their last ever orders. So what can be done to breathe life back into rural communities?

Housing associations have a strong track record of working with communities in rural areas to deliver homes that meet an acute need. They help to carry out housing needs surveys to understand exactly what homes the community needs. They work with landowners and communities to find the right site. They involve the community through the design process so that the homes reflect the aspirations of local people. Last year, housing associations built 3,030 homes in rural areas of England, and started building 3,769. Building homes enables families to remain within the communities they have been in for generations, and this can support rural services by allowing them to remain open.

This report tracks change across three key pillars of community life – pubs, post offices and schools – and demonstrates how building just a few affordable homes in rural settlements can stem the tide.

3,030 

homes were built in rural areas of England by housing associations last year

3,769 

homes were started by housing associations last year in rural areas of England

Rural services in decline: schools

Over the last five years, 52 schools in rural areas of England have closed. This equates to one every five weeks⁶.



52 schools have closed over the past five years in rural areas



Rural schools closing 2012-16

⁶ Department for Education. Edubase <http://www.education.gov.uk/edubase/home.xhtml>


Case study: Primary school on Holy Island (Bernicia Housing Group)

By building new affordable housing on Holy Island, Bernicia Housing Group was able to help keep the island's sole primary school open.

The sharp increase in house prices on the island have made home ownership and renting unattainable for local people, whose modest incomes largely depend on the local catering, tourism or the unpredictable fishing industry. In addition, local pubs, shops, B&Bs and hotels have struggled to keep their businesses running past the tourism season. It was clear that a sustainable and speedy solution was needed to keep this community alive.

It was quickly realised that by building four three-bedroom affordable homes and allocating these to families with local connections, the school would be able to stay open and local businesses would get the staff they needed. This would also help to alleviate the issue of the island's tidal nature, which makes it inaccessible twice a day.

To fund the housebuilding, the Holy Island of Lindisfarne Community Development Trust, Homes and Communities Agency, the Tudor Trust, Bernicia Housing Group and the local council came together. Together they contributed nearly £750,000, and families moved into the four affordable homes in January 2010, providing the vital lifeline needed for the school to stay open. Due to right to acquire rules, the houses cannot be sold, meaning they will stay as affordable rented homes for the benefit of future generations on the island.



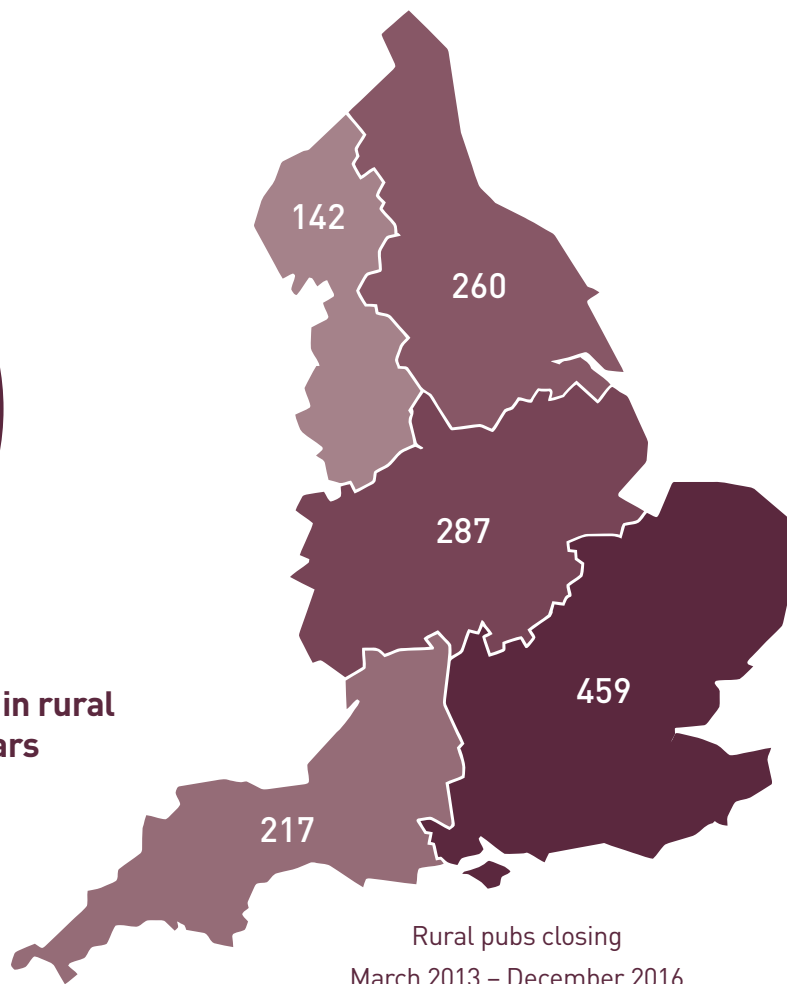
New affordable housing on Holy Island

Rural services in decline: pubs

Between March 2013 and December 2016, a net total of 1,365 pubs in rural areas in England had closed. This is an average of seven pubs per week⁷.



360 pubs a year have closed in rural areas in the last four years



⁷ Data compiled for the National Housing Federation by CGA Strategy.

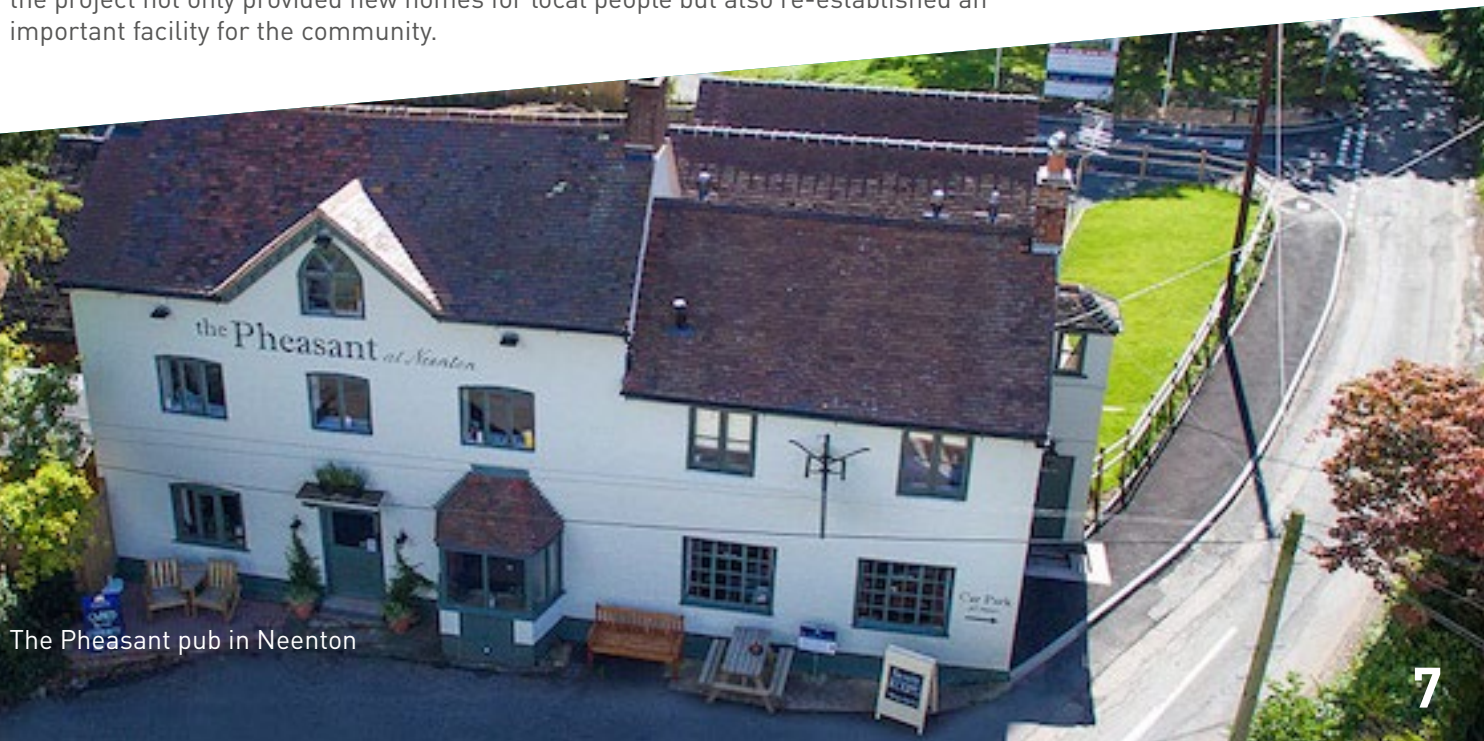
Case study: The Pheasant pub in Neenton (South Shropshire Housing Association)

South Shropshire Housing Association's delivery of vital new housing in the small village of Neenton was instrumental in reviving The Pheasant, a long vacant but popular pub and community space.

The rural village was in desperate need of new homes for local people while the run-down pub, which was falling further into decay, was one of only two community buildings left standing in the area. A recent survey of residents had shown a strong local desire for the pub to reopen, but also highlighted a feeling that additional housing would help secure a future for the village.

Empowered by this support, South Shropshire Housing Association began working closely with local people on a community-led project to build seven new homes for sale and shared ownership – the profits of which would fund the acquisition and refurbishment of The Pheasant. Residents fed into the build and design of the brand new family homes, which completed in 2015. The three, four and five-bedroom houses helped to meet local demand and enabled young people and their families to remain part of the community.

The Pheasant, meanwhile, reopened in 2014 thanks to the innovative approach to covering the costs of its purchase and restoration. The community-owned pub, which features a brand new community space, has resumed its popular use for events, meetings, craft groups and quiz nights. In a perfect example of community-led working, the project not only provided new homes for local people but also re-established an important facility for the community.



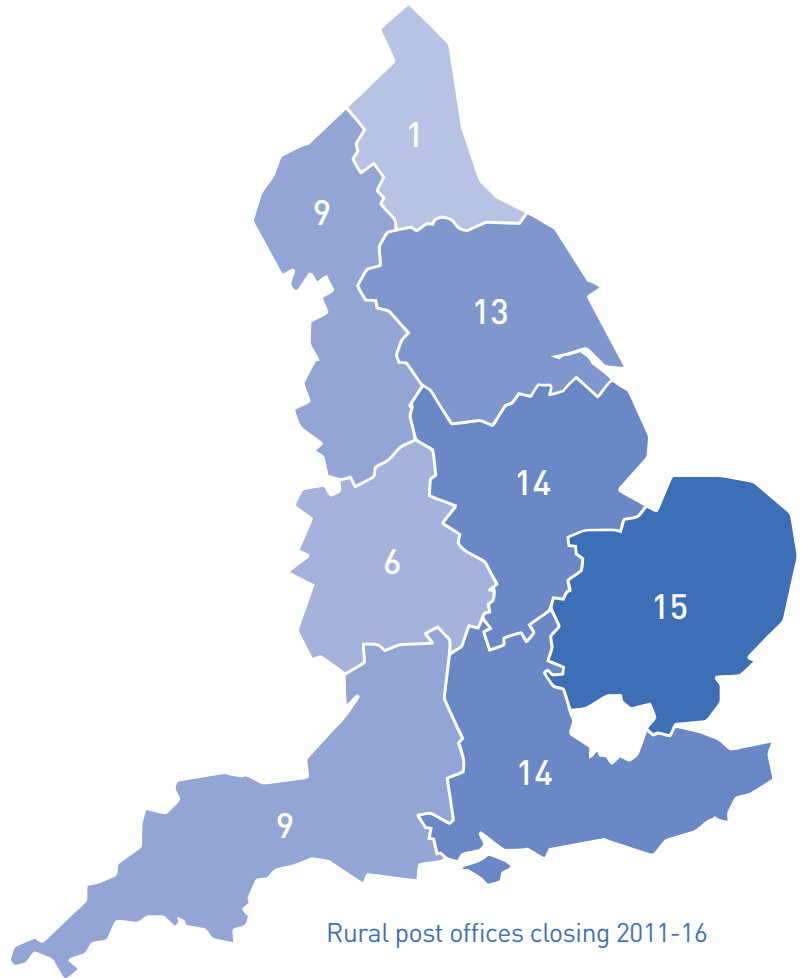
The Pheasant pub in Neenton

Rural services in decline: post offices

In the last five years, there has been a net reduction of post offices in rural areas of 81 – more than one per month⁸.



1 rural post office per month has closed in the last five years



⁸ Data compiled from Post Office network reports <http://corporate.postoffice.co.uk/modernising-post-office>

Case study: Post office in Toller Porcorum (Aster Group)

The local post office in Toller Porcorum, West Dorset, would have closed without the intervention of Aster Group and a team of residents living in the village.

Under threat from its expiring lease, the post office stood as the last remaining community asset in the whole village – with the local pub and shop recently closing their doors for the last ever time. Aster joined Toller Porcorum's Community Land Trust, made up of local people eager to preserve the village's community assets, to develop plans for much needed new affordable homes and a permanent residence for the post office.

Using land, in part gifted to the community trust by a benefactor and resident of the village, Aster secured planning permission and funding for six affordable rented homes for local people – as well as a premises for the popular post office on the same site.

Aster's delivery of the new homes, a mixture of one, two and three-bedroom properties, has given the village a vital lifeline by putting affordable housing in the reach of its local residents. It was also a great example of partnership working. Both the resident group and Aster played key roles in securing the future of the post office through a shared commitment to preserving community life.



Local residents outside Toller Porcorum post office

Housing associations' ambition to deliver for rural communities

Housing associations have an ambition to deliver more new homes. Last year they built 3,030 new homes in rural areas. In order to demonstrate a shared commitment to solving the rural housing crisis, housing associations have created a [5-star plan for rural housing](#)⁹. The plan outlines housing associations' ambition to deliver even more new homes in rural areas to meet the needs of the local community, and ensure that all homes built contribute to the local economy.

We know that people care about the type of homes that are built in their local area, and that support is even higher for building homes that local people on average incomes can afford. Almost three in four (73%) of the English population back new affordable housing in their local area. We also know that almost two thirds (65%) of people living in rural areas are supportive of new affordable homes¹⁰.

In rural areas, housing associations will continue to take a community-led approach to development and will work with communities to tackle the rural housing crisis. We are encouraging anyone with an interest in rural housing and communities to sign up to the 5-star plan. We look forward to working with our members, stakeholders and the Government with whom we aim to progress the plan and deliver the ambition of rural housing associations. It is vital that we continue to work together to ensure a sustainable future for rural communities and that affordable homes are built that contribute to a living working countryside.

73% 
of the English population back new affordable housing in their local area

65% 
of people living in rural areas are supportive of new affordable homes

⁹ National Housing Federation. Rural housing 5-star plan. <http://www.housing.org.uk/topics/investing-in-communities/rural-housing/rural-housing-5-star-plan>

¹⁰ National Housing Federation. Demise of the NIMBY: February 2017 [http://s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/pub.housing.org.uk/Demise_of_the_NIMBY_%E2%80%93_Changing_attitudes_to_building_new_homes_\(February_2017\).PDF](http://s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/pub.housing.org.uk/Demise_of_the_NIMBY_%E2%80%93_Changing_attitudes_to_building_new_homes_(February_2017).PDF)